

disparate sources such who-what-when information. This information, however, is coupled with comments that too often leave the reader wishing the author would have gone further to help us understand “why” —why television, which some saw as promising so much, has delivered so little. Instead, the reader is asked to accept sweeping generalizations: “In the postwar United States, blacks exerted unprecedented influence in domestic politics. The integration of the armed services made black servicemen more influential in military affairs.” Or one is left to puzzle over the implied significance of a statement such as, “One of the few programs to spotlight black talent regularly was American Bandstand.” Or to wonder why, with so many “revolutionary” programs or programs that “radically” changed perceptions, television’s record is judged so poor. One also wonders if MacDonald fully recognizes the medium-program-viewer relationship. Equally as important as what is on the screen is how it is received. There is little consideration of that in this book.

MacDonald is a professor of history at Northeastern Illinois University and a past president of the Popular Culture Association. What he provides with his book is a wealth of facts. For that we should be grateful. What we might also hope for is a subsequent analysis, for which MacDonald has provided the foundation.

— Barbara F. Luebke  
University of Missouri, Columbia

**Roger Mais. *Black Lightning*. (Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1983) 159 pp., \$4.95.**

Upon first opening *Black Lightning*, the reader is surprised to find a fifteen-page introduction to a 136-page novel. Suspicions arise that here is a story that does not speak for itself! Careful examination reveals the introduction to be a scholarly, thorough (if a bit repetitious) review of the novel by Jean D’Costa of Hamilton College in New York. First published in 1955 (the same year Mais died at the age of fifty), *Black Lightning* was published again in 1983 as part of the Caribbean Writers Series with the introduction by D’Costa included. After reading the novel, one suspects that the introduction has been added in an attempt to elevate or justify a poorly-constructed work.

*Black Lightning* tells the story of Jake, an artist-blacksmith who is deserted by his wife, and subsequently by his talent, health, and finally his desire to live. Jake is engrossed in carving a likeness of Sampson, and the author would have us find a parallel between Jake's tragedy and that of the biblical character. (Struck by lightning, Jake even shares Sampson's blindness.) Eventually Jake destroys the carving before finally destroying himself. Interweaving Jake's tale are other personalities too alienated from themselves and isolated from each other to effect a change in Jake's despair.

There is much to criticize in Mais's third and final novel of the Jamaican working class, and little to satisfy. The characters are simply, shallowly drawn. Although the story is told from multiple viewpoints, the reader never has access to the individual's thoughts that are the most pertinent. (For example, not once after her disappearance does Jake think of or speak of the wife whose desertion precipitates his downfall.) There is no realistic detail to engage the reader's visualization of the characters or the setting. Except for a banana tree or a dialectal "bwoy" here and there, the Jamaican setting is unacknowledged.

Between virtually all the characters in this story there exists a tension and a veiled violence. None of them has the self-confidence or the ability to relate effectively with another. D'Costa contends that this alienation and lack of community are a reflection of the Jamaican culture; I suspect the violence is as well. In spite of the book's shortcomings, the reader can't help but respond to the tension with a confused echo of emotion. And *because* of the book's shortcomings, the confusion is never resolved.

*Black Lightning* touches on the nature of love and friendship, the artist as destroyer as well as creator, the risk of attaching sense of purpose to someone outside self. But the simplicity of description produces scenes without resonance, analogies that are acutely trite, and a frustrated reader. The impressionistic pictures the story paints are rather like lightning itself, providing a flat brief illumination with little substance.

— Anne Freitas  
Stockton, CA